DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 417 010 PS 026 308

AUTHOR Hecht, Deborah; Fusco, Dana; Schine, Joan; Berkson, Nancy

TITLE Assessing Caring in Young Adolescent Students Participating in Service Learning.

INSTITUTION City Univ. of New York, NY. Center for Advanced Study in Education.

SPONS AGENCY DeWitt Wallace/Reader's Digest Fund, Pleasantville, NY.
PUB DATE 1995-08-00
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (103rd, New York, NY, August 11-15, 1995).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Early Adolescents; Intermediate Grades; Junior High Schools; Middle Schools; Older Adults; Preschool Education; Program Effectiveness; *Service Learning; Sex Differences; Student Attitudes; Student Volunteers; Test Construction
IDENTIFIERS *Caring; Middle School Students; *Youth Community Service

ABSTRACT

Using as prompts scenarios of interaction at a preschool and senior center, this study examined student responses concerning the degree of caring exhibited. Data were collected from middle school students before and after participating in a service learning program involving service in a preschool, and from nonservice students. The service learning program used the National Helpers Network program model, which stresses the involvement of young adolescents in meaningful work in their community for at least 1 to 2 hours per week, linked with a weekly period of reflection. Of special concern was the caring methodology and how indicators of caring related to specific service learning experiences. Initial findings indicated that scenarios reflecting general moral dilemmas or hypothetical situations resulted in socially desirable responses and that scenarios reflecting actual or typical problems at service learning sites yielded greater variability in response. Pre- and post-program responses to the final service learning scenarios were rated on a 7-point scale for degree of caring, with empathetic communication rated as most caring and violent behavior rated as least caring. Differences were found only in the preschool scenario. Pre- and post-program differences indicated less aggressive responses and less punishment after participating in the service learning and a greater likelihood to invoke communication strategies for handling site-based problem situations. Nonservice students were more likely to use behavioral than communication strategies in handling problems with children. Results support the use of the assessment and suggest that service learning provides opportunities to engage in caring behaviors. (Contains four tables to support completed research.) (KB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 417 010

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Assessing Caring in Young Adolescent Students Participating in Service Learning

Deborah Hecht, Dana Fusco, Joan Schine
and Nancy Berkson

Center for Advanced Studies in Education,
City University of New York, Graduate Center

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND
DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL
HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Deborah Hecht
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, New York, 1995.

PS 026308

Funding for this work was provided by the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund.

Correspondence should be addressed to Deborah Hecht or Dana Fusco, Center for Advanced Studies in Education, 25 West 43rd Street, Room 620, New York, NY 10036.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ASSESSING CARING IN YOUNG ADOLESCENT STUDENTS PARTICIPATING IN SERVICE LEARNING

Abstract

Service learning can provide adolescents with opportunities to engage in and develop caring behaviors. Using scenarios about interactions at a preschool and senior center as prompts, we examined student responses for the degree of caring. The data were collected from middle school students before and after participation in service learning and from nonservice students who served as a comparison group. In this paper we describe the evolution of the caring methodology and examine how indicators of caring relate to specific service learning experiences. The results support the use of the assessment and suggest that service learning provides opportunities to engage in caring behaviors. Pre-post differences indicated less aggressive responses after participation and a greater likelihood to invoke communication strategies for handling site-based situations.

ASSESSING CARING IN YOUNG ADOLESCENT STUDENTS PARTICIPATING IN SERVICE LEARNING

Helping young adolescents develop caring, prosocial behaviors is often viewed as difficult given the many challenges they face. The role that schools can and should play in the development of caring behaviors is often unclear, though some argue that to nurture caring in young people should be a primary goal of education (Cohen, 1995; Noddings, 1992). Service learning has been proposed as one way that schools can help students to develop caring, prosocial behaviors (Conrad & Hedin, 1991).

Service learning students have the opportunity to contribute to the needs of their community, establish personal and positive relationships, and become actively involved in real decision-making. Research has documented that through service learning students gain knowledge about themselves and others, experience an increased sense of competence, hold more positive attitudes about the community and others, and have a greater sense of responsibility (Hamilton & Fenzel, 1987; Hamilton & Zeldin, 1987); however, little work has been done to determine changes in caring as the result of community service experiences.

Maton and Bembry (1992) studied the effects of a social intervention program, "Magic Me," on middle school children. Magic Me is a three-year community service program where students spend one day per week at a nursing home developing a "caring" relationship with an elderly resident. One aspect of caring studied was attitudes toward the elderly as measured by two interview questions. Midway through the program there were no changes in these attitudes. Issues of the caring assessment and specific service program need consideration.

Over the past 14 years the National Helpers Network, Inc. has developed and disseminated a model of service learning for middle school students. This Helper model stresses the involvement of young adolescents in meaningful work within their community for at least 1-2 hours per week and is linked with a weekly period of reflection - that is, planning and preparation, thoughtful discussion, and problem solving - intended to facilitate growth and understanding beyond the specific service experience.

The work described in this paper evolved from an earlier study with middle school students. In this work caring is defined as involving both "feelings and actions towards other people and the responses of those receiving the caring" (Early Adolescent Helper Program, 1991). It is assumed that the quality of caring is present in early adolescents, but that opportunities to exhibit caring behaviors are often lacking in the traditional school setting. Students may not be aware when opportunities to be caring exist, or the perceived peer culture may appear to disdain caring. Assessing caring requires attention to both the student and the setting in which caring may be exhibited.

The general procedure used to assess caring was to examine student reports of how they would respond to situations which could elicit caring behaviors. Opportunities for caring behaviors were explored in relation to two settings: working with senior citizens and working with preschool children. This paper discusses the evolution of a methodology for assessing caring among middle school students, and the field testing of this assessment. To examine changes in caring after one year of service learning under the Helper model, pre-post differences were examined. We also explored how caring indicators relate to the social context in which service learning occurs.

Evolution of a Methodology

Scenario Development

During 1992-1993, 297 middle school students from three schools were asked to respond to scenarios before and after participating in service learning. The initial scenarios represented moral dilemmas not specifically tied to the service experience.

> You are entering the school. You notice a student you do not know spray-painting on the side of the building. What would you do?

and

> You are walking down the street with your friends. An elderly man in front of you trips and falls. Your friends need to get home and encourage you to come along. What do you do?

Results suggested that students often give socially desirable responses to scenarios of this type. There was little variability among responses and solutions lacked multi-step reasoning. In response to the first scenario, 48% responded by saying they would tell someone else at the school; 33% said they would tell the student to stop; and 13% said they would do nothing. Responses to the second scenario were more homogeneous with over 90% reporting that they would help the man; 5% said they would do nothing.

In the Spring, two new scenarios were administered which in an effort to increase the variability among student responses involved other students. Students were asked two questions in response to each scenario: *What do you think you should do?* and *What would you do?*

> You are in a record store. You see a friend put a CD in his or her backpack and walk toward the door. Your friend asks you not to say anything.

and

> There is a student in your class who has very few friends and most people say is very strange. This student works in a local clothing store. When you go to pay for a new pair of jeans, this student tells you not to worry, the student will "take care of it."

Differences were not found between responses to the two questions. In response to scenario one, approximately 60% reported that they would tell someone, while 17% responded "mind my own business," "nothing," or "don't know." To scenario two, 45% said "don't let him/her pay for them" or "pay for them yourself." These responses could not be easily rated for empathy. The cognitive developmental levels of middle school students, i.e., the difficulty in responding to hypothetical situations, was considered as the scenarios underwent further revisions.

Rather than general moral situations, the scenarios were revised to reflect actual or typical problems which arise at service learning sites. The two contexts were typical service sites, a preschool and a senior center. Students were asked *What do you do?* and *How do you feel about...?*

> You are doing service at a senior center. An elderly man has been grouchy all day. He has not wanted to participate in any of the activities. You approach him to ask what is wrong and he says something disrespectful about you (disses you).

and

> You are doing service in a preschool. Carol has been misbehaving all day. She has not been doing what you tell her to do and has already been in one fight. You turn around and she is hitting another child. You tell her to stop fighting and she throws a block at you. It hits you in the leg and hurts..

The revised versions were administered to 260 students from three schools in the Fall of 1993 and in the Spring of 1994 to 223 of these same students. Two schools were in New York City and one in a NYC suburb. Although the schools differed in how they instituted service learning, each program was based on the Helper Model and service learning was required in at least one grade.

An initial content analysis revealed greater variability among student responses to these scenarios than to the general moral ones. The data was used for developing a categorical system for examining caring and for comparing data across pre and post testing intervals within and betwen site context.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Development of Caring Categories and Rating Procedure

Pre and post-survey responses for each scenario were sorted according to conceptual similarity by two raters independently and then collaboratively. A third rater provided an additional check for adequacy and consistency. Percentages of agreement for each category were computed (Table 1). The median agreement was 94% at time 1 and 100% at time 2.

Responses reflect the strategies students use in handling site-specific problems and were classified into three main categories: Interpersonal Communication, Behavioral, and Complex Solutions (Table 2). Each category had several subcategories and the total number of categories was eleven. Eight youth service professionals rated sample responses from each category for the degree of caring on a 7-point Likert scale (Table 3). The numerical weight of each response allows caring to be analyzed quantitatively as well as reported descriptively. Rated as most caring was empathetic communication while a violent behavioral response was seen as least caring. Second in caring to empathetic communication were the Complex Solutions and dual solutions (Tell and Talk), suggesting that others' perceptions of caring may be related to the complexity of thinking about social dilemmas evidenced by the "carer."

Results of field testing

The percentages of responses within each category were compared across pre and post intervals and between service and nonservice students using chi-square analyses (Table 4). The results revealed differences for the preschool scenario. First, while 11% of service learning students at pre-testing would handle "Carol" with a punishment strategy, at post-testing only 4% reported that they would use this strategy (chi-square=4.45, $p=.05$). Comparatively, twenty-two percent of nonservice students would have used a punishment strategy with Carol at post-testing. Second, 10% of service students reported a violent response at pre-testing, while only 5% responded aggressively at post-testing (chi-square=3.00, $p=.08$). Among nonservice students at post-testing, 14% had an aggressive response. Finally, service learning students were more likely to choose communication strategies (70%) for handling problems with children than behavioral strategies (20%). Comparatively, nonservice students were more likely to opt for behavioral strategies (54%) than communication strategies (43%). Interestingly, these trends were not evident for the senior scenario. It is possible to suggest that caring is learned within specific service contexts- *these service learning students worked in a preschool.*

Conclusions

Service learning is often viewed as one way to encourage the development of caring among adolescents. As suggested by this study, after the service learning experience students used more sophisticated, less violent strategies for handling "Carol." Post-responses represented several levels of caring and a greater willingness to intervene on the part of the student. The

BEST COPY AVA

findings of this study support the belief that students who participate in service learning activities are provided with opportunities to engage in caring behaviors and learn caring within specific contexts.

While pre-post differences for complex solutions were not found, it is interesting to note that while 7% of students at post-testing offered a complex solution to the preschool scenario, 0% of responses fell into this category for the elderly scenario. Without knowing the sites that these students served, this finding might be interpreted as a function of middle school childrens' capacity to relate to senior citizens. However, given that these students worked with preschoolers it seems plausible that their experiences caring for younger children provided a schemata for solving site-specific scenarios not available for solving the senior scenario. Further work examining the relationship between the service learning context and activities performed with caring and levels of complex thought processes is underway.

The methodology described allowed for an examination of differences in the reported likelihood to engage in caring behaviors. First, the importance of providing a scenario situation which can be responded to in concrete ways was evident by comparing student responses over the last two years. While results from the first year might suggest that students were more caring in response to the earlier senior scenario, 90% reported that they would help the man, it appears that the scenario invoked one socially correct response which students recognized. Second, asking students to reflect on their behaviors and feelings in response to the person depicted in the scenario appears to be an appropriate prompt for students this age. The inclusion of the feeling question, *How do you feel?*, provided a prompt for caring whereas the question *What do you do?* focused students' attention on behaviors. Finally, the results indicated that while the percentages of student responses in each of the categories differed depending on the scenario and the students' specific service learning experience, i.e., whether they worked in a preschool or a nursing home, the same categories could be used for both scenarios.

Overall students provided a range of responses and indicated a variety of skill levels in dealing with other individuals. While it is not known if student responses would reflect actual behaviors, the assessment indicates student solutions to the scenarios do vary in their levels of caring.

References

Cohen, P. (1995, Spring). The Content of their character: Educators find new ways to tackle values and morality. Curriculum Update, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1-8.

Conrad, D. & Hedin, D. (1991). School-based community service: What we know from research and theory. Phi Delta Kappan, 71, 743-749.

Early Adolescent Helper Program (1991). Measuring Caring: A Report to the Lilly Endowment. National Center for Service Learning in Early Adolescence, Center for Advanced Study in Education. New York, NY.

Hamilton, S. & Zeldin, R. (1987). Learning civics in the community. Curriculum Inquiry, 17, 407-420.

Hamilton, S. F. & Fenzel, L. M. (1988). The effect of volunteer experience on early adolescents' social development. Journal of Adolescent Research, 3, 65-80.

Maton, K. & Bembry, J.X. (1992). Youth caring activity and positive youth development: Creating environments where youth can care. Final Narrative Grant Report for the Lilly Emdowment's Program on Youth and Caring.

Noddings, N. (1992). The Challenge to care in schools. Teachers College Press, New York.

Table 1

Inter-rater reliabilities for student response categories

	Time 1	Time 2
INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION		
Preschool Scenario		
For pre-tests	.80	.98
For post-tests	.94	1.00
Elderly Scenario		
For pre-tests	.94	.94
For post-tests	.95	.95
BEHAVIORAL		
Preschool Scenario		
For pre-tests	.77	1.00
For post-tests	.82	1.00
Elderly Scenario		
For pre-tests	.95	.98
For post-tests	.97	1.00
COMPLEX SOLUTIONS		
Preschool Scenario		
For pre-tests	.57	1.00
For post-tests	1.00	1.00
Elderly Scenario		
For pre-tests	1.00	1.00
For post-tests	1.00	1.00

Table 2

Sample student responses to preschool scenario

CATEGORY	Sample Response
INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION	
Tell an adult	I would ask an adult to spend time with her.
Talk to student	I would take her somewhere and tell her what she did wrong.
Tell and Talk	Sit her down and talk to her myself and if that doesn't work I'd tell a teacher.
Empathetic Communication	Talk to him and ask him what bothers him. I'll try to tell him that there are other ways to express his feelings about other people.
Self-awareness	I would tell the teacher what she is doing and the teacher would take care of it not me because sometimes I have a bad temper with little kids.
BEHAVIORAL	
Punishment	Punish her by putting her in the corner and yell at her if she doesn't listen.
Violent	I will throw the block right back at him.
Aversion	Leave him alone so he could do what he wants.
Time-out for reflection	I would nicely put her in the corner and sit her by herself until she understands what she did.
Diversion	I would tell her to kindly stop and say lets sing.
COMPLEX SOLUTIONS	
Empathetic communic. with social support	I would ask her nicely why she is acting this way and tell her that it hurts me. Then if she doesn't respond properly I would get assistance from the regular teachers.

BEST COPY AVAI...

Table 3

Caring ratings: Means and standard deviations

Sample Student Response	Mean*	Std Dev
Talk to him and ask him what bothers him. I'll try to tell him that there are other ways to express his feelings about other people. **EMPATHETIC COMMUNICATION**	**5.75**	**1.04**
I would ask her nicely why she is acting this way and tell her that it hurts me. Then if she doesn't respond doesn't respond properly I would get assistance from the regular teachers. **COMPLEX SOLUTIONS**	**5.13**	**1.46**
Sit her down and talk to her myself and if that doesn't work I'd tell a teacher. **TELL AND TALK**	**5.00**	**1.31**
I would tell the teacher what she is doing and the teacher would take care of it not me because sometimes I have a bad temper with little kids. **SELF-AWARENESS**	**4.25**	**1.75**
I would take her somewhere and tell her what she did wrong. **TALK TO STUDENT**	**3.63**	**.744**
I would ask an adult to spend time with her. **TELL AN ADULT**	**3.50**	**.926**
I would tell her to kindly stop and say lets sing. **DIVERSION**	**3.25**	**.886**
I would nicely put her in the corner and sit her by herself until she understands what she did. **TIME-OUT FOR REFLECTION**	**2.63**	**1.30**
Leave him alone so he could do what he wants. **AVERSION**	**1.75**	**.707**
Punish her by putting her in the corner and yell at her if she doesn't listen. **PUNISHMENT**	**1.25**	**.463**
I will throw the block right back at him. **VIOLENT**	**1.00**	**.000**

*Raters responded on a 7-point scale: 1, Not at all caring to 7, Very caring.

Table 4

Comparison of pre and post data within and between sites

	Elderly			Preschool		
	PRE	POST	*	PRE	POST	*
INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION						
Tell an adult	.06	.05	.02	.35	.49	.27
Talk to	.09	.14	.14	.09	.10	.16
Tell & Talk	.00	.00		.03	.07	
Empathetic Communic.	.14	.07	.04	.09	.03	
Metaemotion	.01	.00	.02	.05	.01	
	.30	.26	.22	.67	.70	.43
BEHAVIORAL						
Punishment	na	na	.02	.11	.04*	.22
Violent	.12	.11	.10	.10	.05	.14
Aversion	.38	.49	.51	.01	.00	.06
Time-out for reflect	na	na		.00	.04	.02
Diversion	.06	.03	.08	.01	.01	
	.62	.69	.73	.29	.20	.54
COMPLEX						
Empathetic Communic. with social support	.01	.00	.00	.08	.07	.00
	.01	.00	.00	.08	.07	.00

Note: * - comparison group